

Mid-Western Values Plus Character, Credibility and Charm

Susan (Sue) McLaughlin Profile



There really is something special about Mid-Western women. They have strong values, exceptional work ethic, and a focus on results, are confident yet humble...and...they know how to have fun. This description fits Sue McLaughlin to a “T.” People who know Sue as a leader or have worked with her in the community know a lot of other things about her, too. That’s what makes her life and career story all the more interesting.

Growing up “Nebraskan”

Born in Tulsa, OK and raised in Omaha, Nebraska, Sue was the second of four children and grew up in a home impacted by divorce. From the age of 13, when her lawyer-dad left home, Sue’s mother took center stage as far as the family was concerned. Her mother also became a role model for self-sufficiency as she worked and went to school to become a teacher.

While her family’s income may have been modest, there were many valuable lessons taking place and Sue was absorbing them all, e.g., women are strong and can do anything that needs to be done. Not surprisingly, Sue got her first job as a teenager at Dairy Queen. (Note: If they had only known the leadership roles she would later assume, they would have promoted her to manager on the spot!)

When it was time for college, Sue headed to the University of Nebraska in her hometown. Full scholarship in hand, and with her mother as her role model, Sue majored in education and planned to be a math teacher. Academics were always important in the McLaughlin family. In fact, Sue’s maternal grandfather was not only a Methodist minister; he was also president of Dakota Wesleyan in South Dakota and Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa.

A new direction emerges

Well-laid plans are often stepping stones to something completely different as was the case for Sue after graduating with high honor from college. As a matter of fact, Sue struck out for Syracuse, NY in her “little yellow VW,” fully intending to teach high school math. Sue had worked for a bank in Omaha while attending college and, once in Syracuse, took a job with Citibank to “tide her over the summer” until the next school

year began. While at Citi, she discovered another application for her math skills. So, when Citibank asked her to stay, she decided to accept their offer.

Sue's career at Citibank extended for 14 years where she gained valuable financial experience and rose rapidly through the ranks.

Fast forward to 1987 and a new opportunity presented itself with Eastman Kodak Company, a former client at Citibank. There she held a number of key executive positions in both operations and financial management. While at Kodak, Sue served as Vice President and COO of the company's \$2.5 billion Professional Division, the second largest business unit in the corporation. In that role, she was responsible for worldwide operations including sales, manufacturing, logistics and service.

One of her other roles during her 10-year tenure with Kodak was President of Kodak Imaging Services. This particular opportunity presented quite a challenge, since Sue took over a business entity that was losing money and in which the president and CFO had been fired. In short, it was "broken."

Working with a new CFO, Sue created a new team. This entire experience was a turning point for Sue, a time of tremendous personal and professional growth and a time to put many of her own leadership competencies to the test. There were both performance and cultural issues and Xerox was turning up the competition. Sue's task was to change the culture and prepare the business to be sold.

During the next few months, Sue reshaped the leadership team, retaining the top talent and conducting weekly broadcasts to keep the other associates engaged and informed. Within one year, the business unit was turned around and successfully sold and Sue had two emotions: exhilaration and exhaustion!

From corporate leader to entrepreneur

Between 1998 and 2002, Sue's corporate career included two other highly respected companies. For nearly three years, she served as president of BellSouth's Consumer Services business unit, a \$7 billion business with 9000 employees across 9 states. Subsequently she was COO of AGL Resources, another Atlanta-based public company, and CEO and President of its subsidiary, Atlanta Gas Light.

Although Sue enjoyed the many challenges and successes she had over her 25 year corporate career, something happened that she could not ignore. The entrepreneurial "bug" had bitten! In many ways she had always operated with an entrepreneurial mindset, but now, she wanted to go full force. This decision opened the door to a series of new opportunities including serving as part time president of an information services start up in Atlanta, while advising companies in the financial services, document management and healthcare industries.

More opportunities continued to find Sue. One such opportunity was Senior Vice President of Presstek and President of ABD International in Chicago. Sue's role was

crucial in this turnaround, post-bankruptcy engagement in which she helped to attract a strong leadership team and achieve profitability well ahead of expectations.

With the continuing spread of her reputation as a change agent and turnaround specialist, a truly unique opportunity came to call. It was Motto Media. *Motto Magazine* needed a CEO and Publisher and Sue was the perfect choice because not only did she have the requisite experience they needed, she also had a passion for what they stood for. She took swift and aggressive action to create momentum in this struggling national publication while clearly delineating milestones and a timeline to determine the viability of the business. She led the re-branding of the magazine, raised incremental capital from new and existing shareholders, attracted new sponsorships and subscribers, and tested a new business model. In November, 2007, showing both leadership character and courage, Sue responsibly wound down the business with high praise from shareholders after determining that her efforts were not sufficient to offset prior years' poor performance.

Lessons learned and shared

Among the many lessons Sue learned and shared along her professional and personal journey is this: "The attraction of being an entrepreneur is being smaller and faster and less encumbered by politics (of the corporate world.) Being an entrepreneur to me means having more time for the important things."

Sue also has learned - and is a role model for - the importance of integrity in everything that you do. With integrity as a foundation, she believes that showing genuine respect for others is what has allowed her to build strong teams - teams who were not only loyal but who demonstrated that together they could do more than anyone thought was possible. Under her leadership, these teams followed a simple principle: they "dug in" - and did their best.

Other principles that Sue subscribes to and shares are "always over deliver; be credible, do what you say you; and don't forget to have fun!"

Asked to reflect on all of her career achievements to date, Sue shows the "humility trademark" of a true servant leader. In other words, she credits her professional success to the people who saw more potential in her than she herself ever realized.

"I am extremely grateful," she said, "for their influence in my life and career and I try to 'pay it forward' by mentoring and guiding the next generation of leaders."

Paying it forward

If you're around Sue for very long, it's not hard to see that being a part of the community and being active in issues outside everyday business are extremely important to her, e.g., women's and children's issues like health and safety. Sue currently serves on the board of Spelman College as well as Mary Baldwin College and is an avid supporter of Marie Wilson and the White House Project based in Washington, DC.

When it comes to children, she believes that shaping the life of one child may be the most important calling in life. Sue doesn't have children of her own, but she cares deeply for all the children in her extended family. Sue has been blessed to become a "great aunt" four times in the last three years to Cambell, Harper, Lincoln and Riley Susan. She is very involved in the life of one little boy named Dohrean in North Carolina. She also provides support to "at risk" kids who participate in Create Your Dreams, an after school mentoring program in Atlanta. Eighty percent of the kids who have been mentored there between the 4th grade and high school graduation go on to college!

Sue has other passions as well - not the least of which is exercise. To know Sue is to see fitness in action and she maintains her healthy lifestyle with exercise and sensible eating habits. Cycling definitely seems to be her favorite form of exercise and she credits cycling with helping her build endurance and strength over the past 25 years. While you may find her on some local bike trails, she is always up for a cycling adventure including a recent trip to Ireland where she biked for seven days around the countryside. She's also had cycling adventures in France and many other exotic places.

Sue is also paying it forward with her involvement with a group called CEO Netweavers. She is the membership chair for the Atlanta chapter of this national non profit organization founded on the principles of servant leadership. The group has recently launched an initiative called "Navigating for Business Success." This initiative provides one time, expert business advice free of charge to entrepreneurs whose businesses may need a little help to get to the next level and/or to get through the current economic cycle.

What a perfect way for Sue and other servant leaders to share their experience and expertise! It's also one more example of why everyone who knows Susan (Sue) McLaughlin respects her. She is the epitome of a SHERo who keeps on inspiring.

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